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WATERGATE: Attacks on the Left

New facts on 1970 terrorism

CIA linked to attacks on L.A.

By DELLA ROSSA

LOS ANGELES—During the spring of 1970, counterrevolutionary Cuban terrorists carried out a series of armed arson attacks here against the Haymarket, a radical meeting place and bookstore; the offices of the Socialist Workers Party 1970 California election campaign; and the Ashgrove, a coffee house that often made its facilities available to radical causes.

All three victims of these attacks were centers of activity during the massive antiwar upsurge that challenged the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in May 1970.

Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney Stephen S. Trott, who was the prosecutor in the case of three of the terrorists involved in the attacks here, has now revealed in discussions with this reporter that the terrorists had been approached prior to their arson raids by a man claiming to be with the CIA.

When asked if he thought the CIA was involved in organizing the arson attacks, Trott said, "I wouldn't be surprised at anything now, after Watergate. For instance, there is E. Howard Hunt. His MO [method of operation] was to lie to Cubans, saying they would get back Cuba if they helped the CIA. It was a vicious, disgusting business."

"The Cuban exiles hate communists so much they would bomb anything that moved," Trott said, referring to the right-wing opponents of the Cuban revolution, called *gusanos* (worms) by supporters of the Cuban revolution.

The three terrorists prosecuted by Trott—Mario Pelaez, Reynaldo Castro, and Reynaldo Gonzalez—have all been sentenced on charges of conspiracy to commit arson for their part in the attacks here. Pelaez is serving a ten-month sentence in the Los Angeles County jail. Castro and Gonzalez were given sentences of one to 10 years in state prison.

Trott's assertion that the CIA was involved in the terrorist activities was corroborated by interviews with Edward Gritz and Sergeant Charles Louis of the Los Angeles Police Department Criminal Conspiracy Division. Gritz was the attorney for the three *gusanos*. He says he was aware that someone claiming to be from the CIA had approached a number of Cubans in Los Angeles in the spring of 1970. "My clients were used by someone," he said. "I know who it is but I can't reveal the information."

Louis revealed that a Cuban had approached Los Angeles Cuban counterrevolutionaries in May 1970 to "fight Communism and get Cuban back."

Pelaez, Castro, and Gonzalez were arrested while attempting to flee the Ashgrove coffeehouse after the June 7, 1970, attack on that center. The three pleaded guilty when they finally came to trial on Dec. 19, 1972. Victims of the three arson attacks report that Pelaez, Castro, and Gonzalez were only three of at least a dozen *gusanos* who participated in the armed terrorist raids. No one else has yet been prosecuted for taking part in the attacks.

The attack on the Haymarket, which totally destroyed the place, occurred April 13, 1970. Ron White, a witness to the raid, was splashed with a caustic solution that burned his lungs so severely it was feared he would not live. His lungs are permanently damaged.

On May 27, the SWP campaign headquarters at 1702 E. 4th Street was gutted by an armed arson attack by about a dozen *gusanos*. Four election campaign workers were held at gunpoint and told they "would die for Fidel Castro." The four were left inside the building after it was set afire but were able to escape through a fire exit.

Following the attack on the SWP, the Citizens Committee for the Right of Free Political Expression was organized. Sponsors included Angela Davis, State Senator Mervyn Dymally, Jane Fonda, Councilman Billy Mills, and local heads of the Social Services Union, Amalgamated Clothing Work-

ers, and Teamsters.

The committee's purpose was to secure the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the May 27 attack on the SWP campaign headquarters. The pattern of police negligence in the investigation was so pervasive that it raised the question of police complicity in an attempt to cover up the real inspiration behind the attacks.

In the light of Watergate and these new revelations by Trott, this suspicion seems to have been clearly merited. The *gusano* actions were tied to the Nixon "game plan" aimed at attacking the antiwar movement following the May 1970 upsurge. The Los Angeles police and district attorney's office appear to have been cooperating in hiding this fact from the victims of the CIA-inspired attacks.

radicals

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For example, following their arrest, Pelaez, Castro, and Gonzalez skipped bail. Official court records reveal that in April 1971, John R. Howard, a special agent for the Surety Insurance Company, the company responsible for their bail, informed the Los Angeles Superior Court that he had located the three fugitives. Castro and Gonzalez were, according to Howard's deposition to the court, in Mexico City at the headquarters of a *gusano* organization called Alpha 66. He described this as an armed guerrilla warfare training camp that was planning anti-Cuban operations. Pelaez was found at a Colgate-Palmolive plant in Costa Rica.

There is no evidence that there was any move on the part of the court

to bring the three back to Los Angeles following the receipt of Howard's report. Gritz now maintains they never left the U.S. Trott says he also doubts that they were found as indicated in Howard's deposition. There is no explanation for the discrepancy between these two reports.

In any case, the three *gusano* fugitives were finally arrested only in 1972, when Pelaez converted to the Jehovah's Witnesses and, according to Trott, confessed his role in the terrorist attacks in a letter sent directly to President Nixon. The White House, Trott said, notified Pelaez of what he should do to make a formal confession.

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Following Pelaez's confession, a bench warrant was issued for the arrest of the three *gusanos*. One was arrested in Connecticut and the others in Miami.

Trott was also the prosecutor in the case of two other *gusano* terrorists, Hector Cornillot y Lano Jr. and Juan Garcia-Cardenas, for their part in about 10 bombings in Los Angeles in 1968. These included attacks on the Shell Oil Corporation and two Mexican tourist offices. FBI agents testified at the trial of these terrorists that the explosives they used had been obtained from the CIA for use in the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The fact that the CIA allowed these *gusanos* to keep these explosives for seven years after the Bay of Pigs fiasco of 1961 is further evidence of CIA complicity in the April-May 1970 terror attacks against Los Angeles antiwar and socialist organizations.